

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
Bureau of Parks and Lands

Seboomook Unit Advisory Committee Meeting
Greenville Community House
September 27, 2005

DRAFT MEETING NOTES

AGENDA

- 6:00 Welcome, Introductions
6:10 Update on Access Issues
6:20 A Vision for the Seboomook Unit
6:45 Overview of the Allocation Process
6:50 Review and Discussion of the Proposed Allocations and Management
Recommendations (Seboomook and Canada Falls, St. John Ponds, Baker Lake,
and Big Spencer Mountain)
 - Special Protection and Wildlife Management Areas
 - Recreation and Visual Consideration Areas
 - Timber Management Areas8:45 Next Steps

Welcome, Introductions -- *Ralph Knoll, Deputy Director*

Advisory Committee Public Members:

Rick Sylvester, Seboomook Wilderness Campground
Diano Circo, Natural Resources Council of Maine
Bob Guethlen, Rockwood
Jennifer Mills, Windsor, Pittston Farm
Al Cowperthwaite, North Maine Woods
Paul Napolitano, Ragged Lake Riders (snowmobile club)
Sandra Neily, Greenville
Kevin Bernier, Great Lakes Hydro America
Fred Candeloro, Northern Lights ATV Club
Alan Hutchinson, Forest Society of Maine

Legislators

Rep Wright Pinkham, House District 26, Lexington Twp.
Rep Earl Richardson, House District 27, Greenville

Bureau of Parks and Lands Staff:

Ralph Knoll, Deputy Director, Bureau of Parks and Lands
Kathy Eickenberg, Seboomook Plan Coordinator
Pete Smith, Western Region Lands Manager
Leigh Hoar III, Western Region Lands Forester
Matt LaRoche, Penobscot River Corridor Manager
Tom Charles, Chief of Silviculture
Joe Wiley, Wildlife Biologist/IF&W
Scott Ramsay, Supervisor, Off-Road Vehicle Program
George Powell, Director, Boating Facilities

Update on Access Issues – Ralph Knoll (see Attachment 1)

Vision for the Seboomook Unit – Kathy Eickenberg (see Attachment 2)

Review of Proposed Allocations and Management Recommendations

Staff Summaries

Comments, Questions and Discussion

Seboomook and Canada Falls Parcels:

1. Permanent relocation of the snowmobile trail to the alternate route will be disruptive and is not safe. It is currently in poor shape with stumps, drainage and slope issues. This trail is difficult to groom until there is a good amount of snowpack; this will negatively impact business at Pittston Farm [the Bureau also notes that this trail is important to the entire Moosehead Lake loop trail, and could affect the larger Jackman to Millinocket system, since Pittston Farm is a crucial hub for gas and food.] Why can't the road be used?
Response: This is a long-term goal and it is understood that significant improvements would be needed to bring the alternate trail up to standards. However, this is needed to resolve what is expected to be frequent conflicts with winter timber management activities, and to reduce heaving of culverts thought to result from compaction of the snow on the roads from snowmobile use.
2. What kind of trail systems will be developed here? Think about using both sides of the South Branch for trails, or at least portages around difficult rapids; and consult with the boaters.
Response: The Plan only provides direction, not specific plans for trails. It will take time to understand where, and what kind of trails are best suited on this unit; along the rivers is a natural location. We have already consulted with the boating community on the need for signage, and will consult with boaters as suggested regarding bypass routes.
3. Can you prohibit snowmobiles from using the Canada Falls dam access road?
Response: No, we don't own that road. We can limit use of any trail we develop along the river, however. The intent is to manage Canada Falls And the South Branch for a remote, non-motorized winter experience.
4. It would be nice to re-establish the historic portage at Carry Brook. It needs brushing.
Response: Good suggestion. We note this route was used by the Connovers on their Winterwalk 2005. We'll add a recommendation to look into it.
5. How was the boundary of the Mud Cove wetland special protection area determined?
Response: The Maine Natural Areas Program staff did field work and examined resource maps to establish the boundary.

St. John Ponds Parcel

1. Why can't we move the gate on the Gulliver Brook Road up to the parcel so people can't drive into it but can reasonably walk into it?

Response: The gate was there when the state bought the land; we could move the gate but the previous owner had established it where it was to make it easier to monitor; and Great Northern had established a large area behind the gate as a “remote” area, not just the St. John Ponds parcel.

Baker Lake Parcel

1. Wouldn't it make sense to have a ban on personal watercraft on Baker Lake (as well as Seboomook and Canada Falls Lakes as the plan recommends)?

Response: Yes, it would. We will amend the management recommendations to include this, since this is also a lake subject to loon protection provisions attached to the deed.

2. Will you be designating a group campsite on this lake? There is an area on the west shore that has been used for camping in the past.

Response: The draft plan does suggest that we look for a suitable water access or remote group camping site. The location will depend on finding a location that does not conflict with wildlife values.

3. The road to the campsite at the south end of the lake is in poor condition and should be discontinued.

Response: Since this area is allocated as a wildlife dominant area with remote recreation as a secondary use, this suggestion makes sense and we add a recommendation to look into either discontinuing the road or blocking vehicle access to it.

Big Spencer Mountain Parcel

1. Discontinuing the snowmobile trail that goes to the former ranger cabin sends a message to landowner's that the State doesn't want snowmobiles on its lands.

Response: This is not any reflection on how the state feels about snowmobiles. It is purely related to requirements for management of Ecological Reserves. Big Spencer Mountain was acquired by the state with the stipulation that it be part of the Ecological Reserves system. Our management guidelines (as set forth in the Integrated Resource Policy or IRP) for Eco-Reserves requires us to discontinue motorized trails if (1) the trail is not well designed and constructed and in a safe location, (2) the trail has a more than minimal adverse effect on the values for which the reserve was created, or (3) the trail can be reasonably relocated outside of the reserve. In this case, (1) there are environmental problems with the trail – it follows an old jeep trail that has erosion problems and will likely be at least partially retired and converted to a hiking trail; (2) the trail is inconsistent with the secondary recreation uses specified for Ecological Reserves – “opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation including trails and primitive campsites to allow for dispersed non-motorized recreation activity;” and (3) discontinuing the trail does not disrupt a larger trail system, which is what is implied by the provision that would allow the trail to remain if it cannot be reasonably relocated outside the reserve. Nevertheless, we are looking for an alternative high vista trail to replace this one.

2. The alternative of replacing the Big Spencer Mountain Snowmobile Trail with one up Lobster Mountain may not be feasible since it is surrounded by private land. You need to explore whether the affected landowners would be agreeable before putting a recommendation for this in the Plan.

Response: The recommendation was to investigate the possibility of an alternate high vista trail, including looking into a trail up Lobster Mountain. We have not done a thorough study of this option or identified all options. Regarding Lobster Mountain, what was envisioned was the portion of Lobster Mountain on state land, and creating a spur trail from an existing trail. It was our understanding, from a quick review of the existing trails, that we would not necessarily have to build additional trails on private lands (perhaps only on state lands), but that would be determined as part of the investigation. The point was to look for a replacement for the Big Spencer Trail. The recommendation was meant to be general in nature, and mention of Lobster Mountain was not to preclude other possibilities. We will amend the recommendation to remove reference to any particular option.

3. I am concerned that the plan calls for removal of the fire warden's cabin. Why do you feel it is necessary to remove it? Have you investigated whether the cabin has any historic significance?

Response: The cabin is in a deteriorated condition, and represents a potential hazard and liability. It also is inconsistent with the nature of the eco-reserve. The Bureau did review its potential as an historic structure and concluded it was not.

4. How can a parking area be constructed at Big Spencer Mountain if it is an eco-reserve?

Response: A parking area cannot be located on the Eco-Reserve itself. To construct a trailhead parking area would require negotiating an agreement with an adjacent landowner or negotiating an agreement for removal of the area involved from the eco-reserve with the Forest Society of Maine which holds a conservation easement on the property and which deeded the property to the Bureau. We will clarify the Plan accordingly.

Next Steps

Comment period for submission of comments on the proposed allocations and management recommendations: October 15 *[note subsequently revised to end of October]*.

Final Draft to be completed and reviewed at a Public Meeting scheduled tentatively for mid-November.

Plan revised after review of public comments and review of the Commissioner.

Plan adopted, tentatively by the end of the year.

Meeting was Adjourned

ATTACHMENT 1
Bureau of Parks and Lands
Proposal for Management of 20-Mile Gate and Seboomook Unit

The Bureau proposes the following revisions to the current arrangement between the Maine Department of Conservation and North Maine Woods related to the Seboomook Unit and the Penobscot River Corridor. The proposal would keep the Seboomook Unit within the North Maine Woods system, although it modifies the partnership between the Bureau and NMW for this Unit.

1. **The Seboomook Unit remains part of the North Maine Woods system, and the North Maine Woods gate at the 20-Mile checkpoint is retained at its current location. North Maine Woods continues to operate the 20-Mile Gate.** The gate continues to provide a measure of security, and serves as a point of information for visitors to both the Seboomook Unit and the rest of the North Maine Woods system.
2. **The Bureau will maintain campsites on the Seboomook Unit (excluding Baker Lake) and PRC** and receive camping fees less amounts retained by NMW to cover collection and registration services. Baker Lake campsites will be maintained under contract to NMW, with NMW retaining all camping fees in compensation.
3. **A voucher system will replace day use fees for the Canada Falls and Seboomook Lake parcels. Visitors register for day use on a voucher; gate costs are paid the Bureau on behalf of the day use visitors** (see the Attachment for further explanation of the voucher system). The voucher system applies only to visitors to the Seboomook and Canada Falls parcels entering through the 20-mile gate, as the gate is virtually at the doorstep of these parcels (distinct from other state properties which are further embedded in the North Maine Woods system).
4. **North Maine Woods day use fees continue to be charged for visits to the St. John Ponds and Baker Lake parcels.**
5. **Day use fees for PRC users will continue as in the past – NMW will charge day-in and day-out only.** Day-in fees will apply to any PRC user that begins a trip via either the 20-Mile or Caribou gates. Day-out fees are charged whenever the trip concludes within the NMW system.
6. **Camping fees will be set at \$6.00/night, consistent with other campsites in the NMW system. The Bureau of will continue to seek approval for an increase in the camping fees for PRC campsites to \$6.00** to be consistent with other camping fees in the NMW system.
7. **Day use fees will not be charged to in-holding campowners or their visitors, or to visitors to Pittston Farm and Seboomook Campground, unless they intend to travel outside of Seboomook parcel. The Bureau will charge a reasonable annual fee to campowners and businesses** to cover a portion of the gate operation costs the Bureau is paying on their behalf. Businesses could be credited for agreed upon services in lieu of the fee.

A Proposed Voucher System for Visitors to the Seboomook Unit:

How it would work: The Voucher system serves several purposes. While visitors to the Seboomook Unit would not be required to pay a day use fee, registration with a “voucher” makes it clear to them that there are costs for providing a gated access system, and that the state is picking up the tab for these costs for day use visitors.

For visitors:

- NMW would register visitors to the Seboomook Unit, as well as visitors to Pittston Farm and Seboomook Campground, with a voucher that would register information on the users and intended destinations and activities (similar to NMW registration). Parties would receive a copy to put on their dashboard.
- The voucher would state in bold typeface that the cost of staffing a gate and registration program in the NMW system are paid by day use fees; and that the State is paying NMW for these costs on behalf of these visitors to the Seboomook Unit.
- If the party is going to camp on the Seboomook Unit, there should be an entry indicating campsite location, duration, and a place to record fees charged.
- If the party is also going to visit or camp at locations in the NMW system, the NMW registration would also have to be completed and displayed on the dash.
- A separate voucher for campowners embedded within the Seboomook or Canada Falls parcels would be completed on the first visit only. This would make clear that the State is covering their share of the gate costs, and that a separate registration and fee is required whenever they intend to visit other NMW areas (suggest a seasonal pass). Thereafter, they would be allowed to pass through the gate without re-registering unless they have plans to travel outside the Seboomook Unit in the rest of the NMW system. Campowner guests would fill out a voucher for each visit.
- Informational materials would be provided to visitors at the gate and potentially at other locations (such as the Greenville information center, state offices in Greenville, and selected Greenville area businesses, and online). These could include a brochure clearly showing the roads and lands that may be used with the voucher, and points where roads exit the Seboomook Unit and enter into other NMW lands which requires payment of NMW fees and NMW registration.

For NMW and the Bureau of Parks and Lands:

- BP&L would provide vouchers to NMW. NMW would provide the completed vouchers back to BP&L; the information on the vouchers could be processed either by NMW for a fee, or by the BP&L.
- BP&L would pay NMW a fee to cover a fair share of the costs of operating and maintaining the 20-mile gate.

- NMW and BP&L would collaborate on a publicity effort to inform the public about the opportunities provided through the NMW system, and why fees are necessary to support it.

How potential “leakage” through the Seboomook Unit into other NMW areas would be addressed:

- Clear information about the NMW system, the need for fees to support it, opportunities available; where fee-charged lands begin at the perimeter of the Seboomook and Canada Falls parcels (including good signage at exit points);
- Promotion and sale of NMW passes at Pittston Farm and Seboomook Campground (for example, when staff at Pittston Farm pack lunches for client outings, include an inquiry about whether they have the necessary passes);
- Spot check vehicles at perimeter exits, frequently at the beginning of the season to send a message that there is monitoring;
- Initiate on a trial basis for one year;
- Reassess after one year if there is a documented problem. Consider (1) installing an electronic gate on the Rockwood Road near the Golden Road; and at the Seboomook Dam Road near the Golden Road. Continue to monitor for leakage at other exits; (2) State operation of the 20-mile gate on behalf of both NMW and the Bureau; or (3) other options.

ATTACHMENT 2

A Proposed Vision for the Management of the Seboomook Unit

General Principles: The Preliminary Plan has stated that the Seboomook Unit Management Plan, when completed, will be a commitment to the public that the Unit lands will be managed in accordance with the Bureau's mission and goals, and within prescribed mandates. The following vision components stem from the statutory and policy guidance (see Background):

1. Management of the Seboomook Unit is based on the principle of multiple use to produce a sustained yield of products and services, and sound planning (Title 12, Section 1847);
2. The Unit provides a wide range of outdoor recreational and educational opportunities (IRP); including provision of remote, undeveloped areas (Title 12, Section 1847).
3. The Unit provides a demonstration of exemplary land management practices, including silvicultural, wildlife, and recreation management practices (Title 12, Section 1847).
4. There is full and free public access to the Unit together with the right to reasonable use of those lands, except reasonable fees are charged to defray the cost of constructing and maintaining overnight campsites and other camping and recreation facilities. Restrictions on free and reasonable public access are imposed where appropriate to ensure the optimum value of the Unit as a public trust. (Title 12 Section 1846).

Specific to the Seboomook Unit: The Preliminary Plan also establishes a framework for a vision that is specific to the Seboomook Unit. It states that one objective of the Plan will be to provide a balanced spectrum of opportunities across the Unit, and in keeping with the opportunities and resources available in the broader surrounding Moosehead Region.

5. The Seboomook Unit provides a semi-remote or "back woods" experience in a relatively accessible portion of Maine's vast undeveloped northern forest region. Management of the Unit provides a high quality recreational experience, demonstrates exemplary multiple use, sustainable forest management in accordance with the guidance provided in the Integrated Resource Policy; advances understanding of the values of ecological reserves and special protected resources on the unit (including loons, eagles, and rare or unusual plant communities); and models partnerships with private landowners, businesses, and organized user-groups.
6. The quality of the forest is improved, and a multi-aged forest is being regenerated that supports a high quality recreation experience, enhances wildlife habitat, and, on those portions of the Unit actively managed for timber, produces high value products through the growth of large trees. A significant portion of the Seboomook parcel is managed cooperatively with the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife for deer yards and other wildlife habitat, including special protection areas around eagle and loon nests.
7. Visitors to the Seboomook Unit can easily and conveniently obtain information about the recreational facilities and opportunities on the Unit, the Penobscot River Corridor, and the surrounding North Maine Woods lands at a North Maine Woods checkpoint, or on the Unit at a ranger station or from one of the embedded private businesses (Pittston Farm or Seboomook Campground). The Seboomook and Canada Falls parcels are managed with an active yet unobtrusive ranger presence.

8. The spectrum of available recreation experiences ranges from “remote” to “primitive, vehicle-accessible,” and includes hunting, lake and river boat based fishing, bank fishing, trapping, flatwater and whitewater boating, hiking, primitive camping, wildlife viewing, nature study, bicycling, horseback riding, snowshoeing, back-country skiing, winter camping, and snowmobiling. ATV touring occurs subject to specific conditions defined below (#9), as part of a significant extended ATV trail system for which the Seboomook Unit is a crucial linkage.
9. Equestrian, bicycling, and ATV trails are designated or developed to provide a high quality back woods trail experience, and to minimize adverse impacts on wildlife, other users, and adjacent landowners, and are managed through a collaboration involving the state and local clubs or businesses, and surrounding landowners.
10. The recreation and wildlife values of the unit are maintained with a minimum of trails, roads or improvements, such as parking areas. Any recreational improvements are located in proximity to existing roads and facilities, or in areas that minimize adverse impacts to wildlife and other sensitive resources.
11. Timber management, where allowed, is conducted with a minimum of roads. Existing timber management roads have been systematically evaluated to determine which should be retired and which are needed for forest or recreation management objectives. A core system of management roads is available for public vehicular use; other management roads are closed to vehicular use but available, when not being actively used for forest management, for hiking, hunting, snowshoeing, back-country skiing, equestrian uses, or bicycling, depending on the nature of the land base.
12. Nature trails are developed along sections of the rivers and at other selected areas that offer unusual wildlife or scenic viewing opportunities. The warden’s jeep trail and hiking trail on Big Spencer Mountain have been relocated or stabilized to eliminate problem erosion areas and provide better opportunities for the public to appreciate the special features of this ecological reserve. The warden’s cabin has been removed, and a parking area and trailhead serve the new trail.
13. The recreational experience on Seboomook, Canada Falls, and Baker lakes is one of being in a remote, undeveloped area. Lakeside camping opportunities include drive-to primitive sites, walk-to remote sites, and remote water access sites. The lakes are used primarily for fishing, kayak and canoe touring, or pleasure boating in small watercraft. Boat access facilities are either carry-in or suitable for small-motored boats.
14. Areas are designated around the lakes, suitably buffered from deer yards, snowmobile trails and private camps, for remote winter camping, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing.
15. The existing heavily used snowmobile ITS Connector trails continue to be provided through partnerships and are improved or relocated as necessary to improve safety, reduce impacts on sensitive resources including wildlife and significant plant habitats, erodible soils, watercourses, etc., or avoid conflicts with other uses including timber management, while contributing to a regional winter tourism opportunity. The existing primitive, unimproved snowmobile trail up Big Spencer Mountain is discontinued, and an effort to find an alternate high vista destination trail in the same general area is either ongoing or has established a replacement.